



Echo from the Mountains

Victorian High Country Huts Association Inc – A0043804Y

Vol. 5 – No. 1 March 2007

ISSN 1448 – 3769

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FIRES 2006-2007 IT HAS BEEN A LONG HOT AND DRY SUMMER!

During the recent fires there were a number of reported losses of huts in the Victorian high country, including the highest profile hut in Australia, Craig's hut at Mt Stirling, built for the iconic movie *The Man from Snowy River* as depicted in the Banjo Paterson poem of the same name, and we lament the loss of all cultural and heritage icons of our past, both European and Indigenous.

During the 2003 fires some 65 huts were lost, and the Association has worked very hard for the last four years to preserve the rich history of Victoria as associated with the remaining 200 high country huts - cattleman's huts, miner's huts and cottages, homesteads, ski huts, bush-walker's huts, and refuge huts of every shape and description, as well as some unique huts such as the Flying Swagman in the Corryong area and the Underground hut at Yackandandah.

We put our trust in the work of the last three years and can report that although the fires of 2006-07 were more extensive than 2003 it would appear our huts have fared much better.

An indication of the extent of the fires is encapsulated in the inability of the webmasters of the NSW bushfire website to describe the extent of Victoria's fires... "To date the area covered by these fires is over 1,000,000 ha (big)" (http://www.bushfire.nsw.gov.au/dsp_more_info.cf?CON_ID=4316&CAT_ID=684, accessed 18 January 2007)

HUTS LOST

We can now confirm the loss of the following huts in the recent bushfires across Victoria. There may

be others lost in the more remote areas but as access is still restricted and the fire season is not yet over it may be some time before we know the full extent of the fire damage. (Land tenure: PV = Parks Victoria, DSE = Dept Sustainability & Environment, PP= Private Property)

Licola Area

Pinnacles (PV), Snowy Range airfield hut (PV), Traralgon high school camp (PV).

Baw Baw Area

Christians hut Mt Selma (DSE).

Howqua Area

Bluff (PV), Craig's (DSE), Howfield Refuge Pikes Flat, Mt No. 3 Refuge (DSE), Ritchie's (PV).

Barry Mountains Area

Cropper Creek (DSE), Dandongadale (DSE), Ryan's (PP).

Bogong/Hotham Area

Blair's Simmonds Gap (DSE), Weston's (PV).



The Mt Buller Gnomes' home prior to December 2006, with lots of foliage near their house.

Below, the Gnomes came very close to losing their home. See page 7 for what the sign on the door says.

Photos courtesy of forums on www.ski.com.au.



Some photos of the sad scenes that greeted the first visitors to huts sites are included in the following pages ... but re-growth is already well underway and we shall soon see work on the huts again.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Once the fire situation eased a little the VHCHA sprang into action. A formal application was made to Parks Victoria to re-build Bluff, Ritchie's and Weston's huts.

The Ministerial Bushfire Recovery Task Force meeting in Bright on 13th February 2007 was attended by Fiona and Lee, the result of which was a submission for funding maintenance by volunteers of high country huts located on Dept. of Sustainability & Environment (DSE) and Alpine Resort land, an extension of the Memorandum of Understanding between VHCHA and Parks Victoria on **Care and Management of Huts in the Alpine District** to cover those huts on DSE and Alpine Resorts land, and funding to extend the **Victorian Alpine Huts Heritage Survey 2004-05** to those huts not covered in that survey.

The burnt huts stakeholder meetings have been attended by VHCHA committee members & HMOs, members of the families associated with the huts lost, DSE & Parks Victoria (ParksVic). These meetings form the basis for collating the information necessary to obtain approval to re-build huts.

The government has already allocated some funds:

- ♦ Mansfield DSE has received a grant of \$70,000 for safety related work on huts. The Stoney family is proceeding with the paperwork for the rebuilding of Bluff hut. The Ritchie family would like the VHCHA to be involved in the rebuilding of Ritchie's hut.
- ♦ Craig's hut has an allocation of \$300,000 for replacement and rectification of the precinct including camp sites, yards, tracks, car parking, etc. Works are to be completed by early December this year as the hut is very important to tourism in the region, with 80,000+ visitors per annum. As the Mansfield Shire, local stakeholders and DSE are involved the VHCHA does not expect to be called upon to assist with the project.
- ♦ The VHCHA's formal application to ParksVic to re-build Bluff, Ritchie's and Weston's huts is now part of the burnt huts stakeholder's deliberations.

On 21st February our Secretary David Oldfield and Chris Smith (ParksVic) walked into Ritchie's on the 6km goat track from the 8 mile hut site then they were driven to Bluff hut by Nigel of ParksVic, Mansfield. These sad photos show what they found.



Bluff hut, 21 February 2007. Photo courtesy of David Oldfield.



Ritchie's hut, 21 February 2007. Photo courtesy of David Oldfield.

COMMITTEE REPORT

The planned meeting of HMOs and Committee in January was postponed until cooler weather and on Saturday 17th March a combined Committee/HMO meeting was held in Wangaratta.

Since the last meeting in November many of our members have been very busy with the bush fires and now the recovery effort. As a result of the fire situation the association issued a special bulletin in December with a Fire Risk Management Policy to ensure none of our members were in danger during the height of fire activities. This policy was formally adopted at the Wangaratta meeting.

The car stickers to promote that "**WE GIVE A HUT!**" were distributed to members at the same time as the special bulletin.

The Committee also acknowledged the efforts of all members during the fire period in stepping up to the mark (old baseball saying) to take on roles to help others and keep as many people as possible informed.

We did not deem it appropriate to place speculative information on our official website when there was enough of that on various other sites and in a myriad of chat rooms. Suffice to say we will add a list of huts lost shortly and work will begin to update the site in other ways over the next few months.

INDIGENOUS ADVISER

The Committee has gratefully accepted an offer from one of our members to become our Indigenous Advisor. Colleen Nagle is currently a ParksVic Ranger based in Omeo and she works closely with the HMOs in areas 9A&B, 10 & 11. Colleen regularly attends Committee meetings in her capacity as a ParksVic Ranger and her wealth of personal experience as a member of the indigenous community coupled with her special understanding of the parks and her passion for the huts make her an invaluable asset to the Committee.

Your 2007 Committee...

President	Fiona Magnussen *
Vice President & Newsletter Editor	Paula Tomsett
Secretary	David Oldfield
Treasurer	Sue Manneken
Merchandising	Greg Love
Merchandising	Lee Magnussen *
Website	Mike Shaw
Committee Members	Ken & Vicky Birch Richard Hubbard * Bob Johnstone *
Huts Maintenance Coordinator	Robert France

* These Committee members are also HMOs.

DIARY DATES FOR 2007

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Saturday 20th October 2007

In order to make the most of the number of weekends available for maintenance and works after the tracks and parks re-open after winter and before the fire season starts we have decided to move the AGM to October. Please note the date is Saturday 20th October 2007 in Corryong. There will be a dinner and get-together on the Saturday evening followed by tours to the Flying Swagman hut and Laverty's hut on the Sunday.

HUTS PRE-XMAS GET-TOGETHER Saturday 1st December 2007

Put this one in your diary – an opportunity for a social get-together with like-minded “hutties” and look at an environment with a difference. This year we will venture to the Point Cook Homestead and adjacent Marine Park to check out the coastal scene. The RAAF Museum is just around the corner and the homestead has a super (and very reasonably priced) café for a lunchtime gathering. Watch future newsletters for all the details.

Last year a lively crowd ventured through the smoke on Sunday 10th December to enjoy brunch at the Ski High Restaurant, Mt. Dandenong – not much view but the camaraderie was great. Paula

won the lucky dip Christmas gift of the Tims Tams mugs & coffee kindly donated by Margaret & Terry Foulds.

HMO ACTIVITIES

There are many areas of parks and forests that are still closed to the public. It is important to check with the appropriate authority (Parks Victoria or DSE) before entering any area affected by the 2006/07 fires.

Huts Maintenance Coordinator Robert France M 0411 813 352 E robert@MountainSoul.com.au	
Area	Huts Maintenance Officer
1 & 3: East Gippsland & Dargo	Damian Crozier P 03 5152 3147 cruetzr@aapt.net.au
2: Nunniong	HMO WANTED
4 & 5: Licola & Baw Baw	HMO WANTED Mick Vanderzalm P 0429 024 445 mick.v@efel.com.au
6: Marysville	Peter Graham P 03 9850 8441 or 0419 380 563 prgraham@bigpond.com
7: Howqua	Chris Clarke P 03 5776 2308 clarkes@mansfield.net.au
8: Barry Mountains	Andy Kass P 0438 300 713 huts@cfa4wd.org
9A: Hotham	HMO WANTED
9B: Bogong	Bob Johnstone P 02 6056 9491 or 0417 680 758 bobjohnstone@optusnet.com.au
10: Dartmouth	Brad Cooksey P 02 6024 3137 traceynbradley@bigpond.com
11: Davies Plain	Richard Hubbard P 02 6076 1570 hubbards@motherhubbards.com.au
HMO Area names are general geographic names only and do not reflect the extent or number of huts in each area. For this information see our website – www.hutsvictoria.org.au .	

Not all our huts have huts maintenance officers and we are looking for HMOs for Area 2 Nunniong, Area 5 Baw Baw (or an Assistant HMO for Mick Vanderzalm) and Area 9A Hotham.

If you or a group you are a member of are interested or know of someone who may be interested please contact HMC Robert France or President Fiona Magnussen.

Owing to the extreme conditions from December until quite recently there was little opportunity to carry out maintenance in some areas and HMOs were forced to cancel planned works, often at very short notice. HMOs are currently putting together work plans for later in the year and also for any huts that are accessible during the winter months – not all high country huts are actually above the snowline!

AREA 1 EAST GIPPSLAND & AREA 3: DARGO HMO - DAMIAN CROZIER

In February 2007 Damian, carried out a maintenance works inspection at Wilson's hut.

Wilson's hut, located on Marriott Track, Bendoc was built in 1916 by Alfred & Eileen Wilson. It has an interim listing on the Australian Heritage Database from which the following information was extracted: *Wilson's hut demonstrates the widespread movement of people onto leaseholds in the forest to provide a subsistence living both with pastoral and forest activities, as well as...agriculture. It demonstrates uncommon human endeavour, given the location and harsh living conditions. The hut is a representative and rare example of bush cut construction and its detailing is also rare. It is an important and evocative site symbolising the spirit and human endeavour of the early European communities of far north East Gippsland and exemplifies a traditional connection between the past and present through it being actively conserved.*



A previous maintenance visit was undertaken in September 2005 but the results were not formally recorded as part of normal HMO inspection activities. The primary purpose of the February inspection visit was to examine and report on the condition of existing components of the hut and to identify those requiring imminent maintenance works. Additionally, the outside area of the hut was inspected for the build-up of fire-promoting debris. A simple visual inspection of the existing conditions quickly revealed that the majority of the hut's components (both inside & outside) were in a serviceable condition.

The current site inspection was undertaken in the presence of local DSE Ranger, Andrew Hammond. Preliminary discussions with Andrew in early 2006 had identified the need for some repairs but no timetable was set for a maintenance programme.

Andrew has been instrumental in organizing recent maintenance works at the site, including the procurement of materials and labour to undertake full replacement of all external timber posts; reinstatement of the hardwood floor including repairs to several bearers and joists; replacement of several window frames and glass panels; re-construction of the timber and corrugated iron chimney and re-bricking of the fireplace; installation of a galvanized iron water tank and connections to the gutters; replacement of old gutters with new galvanized iron gutters; and whitewashing of the inside walls.



Wilson's hut: new water tank and gutters



Wilson's hut: repaired timber posts and chimney

All photos of Wilson's hut are reproduced courtesy of Garry Watts.

Damian reported that the works have been undertaken at the sole discretion of DSE and demonstrates their understanding of the importance of preserving high country history for future generations. To complement the recently completed repair works, the corrugated roofing iron should be replaced in the short-to-medium term and approx. 42 sq.m of roofing is required.

AREA 4 LICOLA & AREA 5 BAW BAW HMO - MICK VANDERZALM

No report owing to bush fire activities.

AREA 6: MARYSVILLE HMO - PETER GRAHAM

Peter has done an initial survey of Keppel's and Nissen huts and with the Jeep club plans to do more surveys in the near future.

AREA 7: HOWQUA HMO - CHRIS CLARKE

The Fry's hut Stage 2 work was completed in November 2006. The work comprised pulling down the east wall and replacing it with new bed log, new posts and split slabs, installing a new floor in the north east room, and applying waterproofing mix to the new work. People there: Ken & Vicky Birch, David Oldfield, Ray & Ann Sparkes, Terry & Margaret Foulds, Andy Kass, Bruce Dodson, Paul Burke, Chris Clarke, Tony Clarke, Philip Menere, Frank Gray, James Findlay, Craig Donaldson, Lloyd Hetrick, Rob France, Vince Bosua, John Exner, and Fleur & Nigel from Parks Victoria. A good time was had by all!



Fry's Hut east wall, Photo courtesy of David Oldfield

Although the fires raged in the area, Fry's hut came through unscathed, which can no doubt be attributed to the extensive works on the hut and clearing of the area over the last twelve months by VHCHA work parties and ParksVic.

The following is Chris Clarke's own account of the last days of Ritchie's hut, Saturday 2nd December 2006: *"The lightning strikes the night before had started the fires at Mt Terrible,*

amongst others, so I had thought twice about going in but the fire was well away with the wind blowing in the right direction. ParksVic knew where I was and I would be out by the afternoon. After walking in the 3 km from the 16 mile end I spent a few hours clearing fuel and debris from the immediate hut vicinity and thought at the time how ineffective this would be in saving the hut in a wild-fire situation, due to the heavy fuel load in the surrounding bush. Still it might just help in an ember attack.

I had a nice lunch with 4 visiting Air Force Fly Fishing enthusiasts from Canberra (the ABC series "A River Somewhere" introduced them) along with a Horse Riding party of 10 from Shepparton who were camping at Sheeppyard. It seemed like a nice day was being had by all.

I packed my things back into the Tool Cart (See more about that later. Ed.), wished them well, walked back out and drove home to Tolmie via Bindaree hut, which needed no clearing work.

Once home I notified Fleur (ParksVic Ranger for HMO Area 7. Ed.) that I was out and there were others still in and the rest is history as the saying goes. I feel quite sad and yet somehow privileged to have shared Ritchie's so close to its demise. Looking forward to the Rebuild."

The Tool Cart Chris referred to shows just how innovative our HMOs are. He put it together as a means of getting equipment into huts that can only be reached on foot. The Tool Cart transports a brushcutter, rake-hoe, and other assorted tools.



Chris & his tool cart, it may only be 2W, but the tyres look like they'd go anywhere. Photo courtesy of the man himself, Chris Clarke.

AREA 8: BARRY MOUNTAINS HMO - ANDY KASS

Andy Kass is with the CFA 4WD Club so we know what he has been doing for the past three months!

AREA 9A: HOTHAM HMO WANTED

There is still some minor work to be done at CRB hut Dinner Plain, which may happen before winter.

AREA 9B: BOGONG HMO - BOB JOHNSTONE

The clean-up weekend went ahead on 2/3 December but only those huts that could be easily accessed on foot from the gates were visited. Huts which received a clean-up around them were Young's, Weston's, Faithful's, McNamara's, Cope and Wallace.

At Wallace hut an unknown visitor had dragged the big logs, fashioned as seats, from near the BBQ area to inside the hut. With the assistance of a walking group who were visiting the hut, the logs were removed and put back at their original location. Arranged around the BBQ area were a number of large tree limbs being used for seating, but large enough to poke into a fire and it was recommended that these be reduced to burnable size fuel on the next ParksVic or HMO visit to the hut.

Sadly, in spite of the clean up around Weston's the hut was lost in the fires. Thanks to Garry, Geoff, Barry, and Enzo (ParksVic) for supporting Bob in the Bogong area clean-up.

Roper's Hut Rebuild

Barry Hazeldine has kindly agreed to take over the lead on this project. The re-build planned for January had to be re-scheduled owing to the fire situation and whilst this was disappointing for all concerned, particularly the Roper Family, it is now likely to take place immediately the tracks are open after winter. Plans are in place to store the materials ready to be over-snowed into the site during winter if the opportunity arises. Enzo (ParksVic Ranger) will inspect the snowgum poles we have been offered and HMO Brad Cooksey has offered to help with the drawings.

AREA 10: DARTMOUTH HMO - BRAD COOKSEY

On Sunday the 11th February 2007 Brad led a team to Laverty's hut which had suffered from 5 years of neglect. They restored the fireplace and chimney, which involved installing stone work on the outside of the fire place. The top of the stonework was parged so that the rain runs off (It is raining in the high country as this is being prepared. Ed.).

Work left on the fireplace is to make up flashing for the top of the stone work. The fire place is now safe from starting a fire on the outside of the hut should grass grow too close to the hut. Sincere thanks to P.G.Cooksey for donating the cement and sand and being a big help on site. He is also making the flashing to finish the job. All up 9 bags of cement and over 1.2 cubic metres of sand were used plus conmix and cement on the footings.



*Laverty's hut chimney, before works.
Photo courtesy of Brad Cooksey*



*Laverty's hut chimney, after works. A good example of why Brad and his team are in demand with other HMOs wanting rockwork done.
Photo courtesy of Brad Cooksey*

It is well documented that many huts are located at sites that were used by the local indigenous peoples for the same reasons the site was deemed good for a hut – near water, accessible, good view of weather conditions, shelter, etc. and Brad is keen to document the indigenous heritage of hut sites and produce plaques for each site.

AREA 11: DAVIES PLAIN HMO - RICHARD HUBBARD

With DSE being somewhat busy with fires and fuel reduction burning no work was done over summer. Richard is working on the heritage listing application for the Flying Swagman Hut. This is a unique structure built to cover a glider, which its owner literally catapulted into the air from the top of the hill where the hut is located. More on this intriguing piece of our high country heritage in future issues of *Echo from the Mountains*.



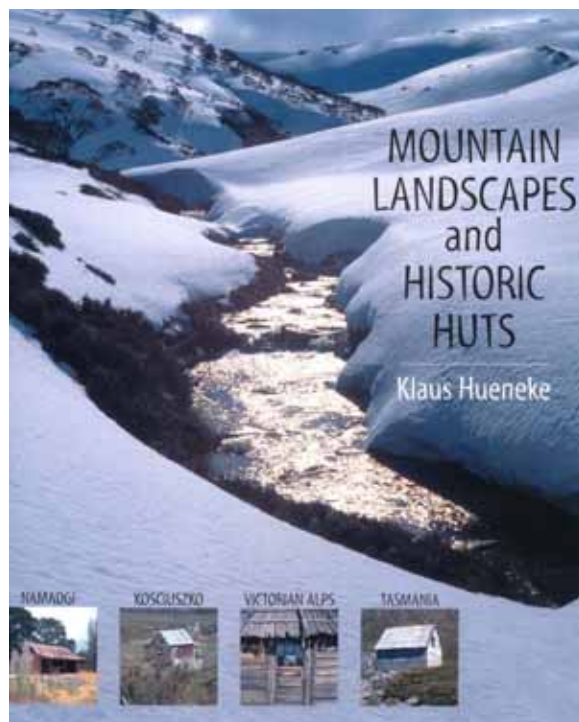
This above photo shows the Flying Swagman hut circa 1984. Sadly, below is what it looks like now. Photos courtesy of Richard Hubbard.



BOOK REVIEW by David Oldfield
Mountain Landscapes & Historic Huts
by Klaus Hueneke
\$39.95 + \$10.00 p&p from Tabletop Press, 2
Lambell Close, Palmerston 2913

This handsome book of 118 pages is a distillation of 35 years of wandering in the High Country of Australia by Klaus Hueneke carrying his trusty Rolleicord camera to capture the evocative colour

photographs displayed here. There are sweeping vistas of snow clad mountains in the Snowy Mountains, glimpses of the rivers and mountains around Canberra, close-ups of flowers on Victorian ridges and shots of sparkling tarns in Tasmania. But threaded throughout there are images of huts, their surroundings and interiors, with willing workers rebuilding, repairing and maintaining them, illustrating better than any words the author's love affair with huts. Each section, on Namadgi, Kosciuszko, the Victorian Alps and Tasmania, is introduced by a couple of pages of text which neatly set the scene for the photographs that follow.

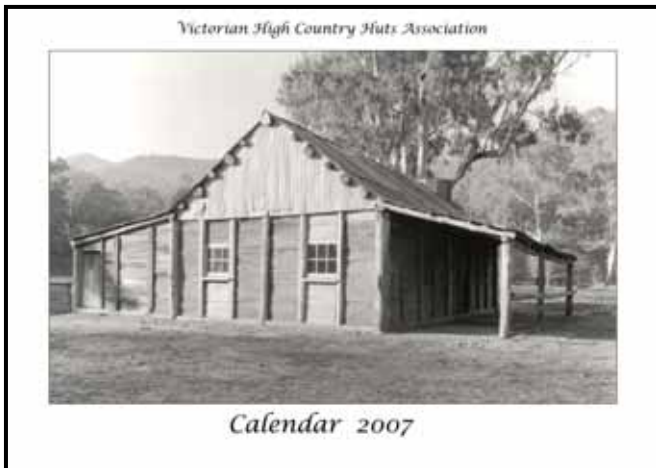


This is a book that will certainly inspire all readers to pack up and head for the hills to enjoy the wonderful experience of the High Country shared by the author.

Clever little Gnomes! Photo courtesy of forums on www.ski.com.au.



LIMITED STOCK 2007 CALENDARS



Limited copies of the 2007 calendar are still available.

Featuring photographs of huts from each of the Huts Maintenance Areas - Suggan Buggan School House, Woodhouse Logging Camp, Lankey Plain Hut, Moroka Hut, Jan's Hut, Keppel's Hut, Fry's Hut, King River Hut, McNamara's Hut - Dinner Plain, Cope Hut, Kennedy's Hut, and Gibson's Hut.

The photographers are all VHCHA members and each person who submitted a photograph is represented in the calendar. We thank those members for their contribution - Patricia Morrissey, Bill Statton, Bruce Unmack, David Oldfield, Andy Kass, Keith Oxenbould, Brad Cooksey, and Richard Hubbard.

The cost of calendars is \$10 including \$2.00 for P&H. See website for order form.

WEBSITE ADVERTISING

At the discretion of the Committee, members of the VHCHA may advertise books, art, or other products on the website at no charge, provided the material supports the purpose of the VHCHA. Requests should be submitted to the Newsletter Editor.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

Advertisements will be accepted from current financial members at the discretion of the Editor based on availability of space and in order of receipt, at \$20 for a small advertisement on the back page. Contact the Newsletter Editor with any advertising requests.

The presses were stopped...
which is why you are receiving your March *Echo from the Mountains* in April!

\$60,000 for huts restoration

On Thursday, March 29, 2007 at Whitfield in the north east Premier Steve Bracks and Minister for Regional and Rural Development, John Brumby, unveiled the \$138m recovery package to help rebuild, restore and equip bushfire-ravaged communities across Victoria for the future. "In the North-East, the Great Divide fires burnt for 69 days, burning nearly 1.2 million hectares, or the equivalent of 10 million average-sized house blocks. This package is about providing support to individuals, farmers, businesses and communities in the aftermath of these fires and at the same time looking further ahead, so that our bushfire-affected regions can not only recover but continue to grow." Mr Bracks said.

Included in the package is \$60,000 to assist volunteer groups (VHCHA) to restore high country huts.

(Source – media release issued by the Office of the Premier on 29 March 2007.)

We have listed Strobridge hut Brookville, Boggy Creek CRB hut, Wheeler Creek hut and the Flying Swagman, all as priorities for restoration and Weston's (PV Bogong Unit), Richie's & Bluff (PV Howqua Unit), Refuge Hut No 3 at Mt Stirling (DSE land) and Cropper Creek Hilton as a management hut for Melbourne University Hydrology unit, on DSE land, in the upper Buffalo River catchment, for re-building. The VHCHA Committee and HMO's will set priorities for works at a planning day early in May at which time it is expected we will have more information about the funding of the works to replace huts.

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www.hutsvictoria.org.au

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